

Approved 03/06/08

Exeter Fire District

(Budget Hearing - February 28, 2008)

Call to Order

Chairman Peter Lacouture called the February 28, 2008 budget hearing to order at 7:10pm. Present were commissioners Vergano, Walker, Lacouture, Wilbur, Gallagher and Nievera. The district treasurer, Ms. Caito, was also present. There were 14 members of the public in attendance.

Budget Hearing

Mr. Lacouture gave a short overview of the district budget along with a brief description of the upcoming tax sale scheduled for May 21st. He noted that the budgetary increases to be dealt with ranged from 4.4% to 12.7% and that the overall increase would be just over 7%.

Mr. Wilbur gave a brief explanation of the administrative budget as developed by Ms. Caito, Mr. Lacouture and himself. He noted the increase necessary in the salary line item was due, in part, to the increased number of hours worked by the collector in preparation for the district's first tax sale. He also explained the rationale for budgeting a 5% increase for the collector's salary. Mr. Wilbur also

explained the 25% increase in the insurance line item as being necessary to cover a general rate increase as well as a doubling of the umbrella policy on the board. There was one question concerning the spending of these funds on increased insurance during a fiscally “tight year”. Most board members agreed that this was money well spent.

Joe Conroy (Treasurer, EVFD #1) was available to answer any questions concerning EVFD #1’s budget request. He explained that the addition of their newest engine, expected in the near future, will enable them to retire both Engine-7 and Tanker-8. This will enable them to increase their water supply effectiveness by a factor of 6 under ideal conditions. Training was another area that Mr. Conroy addressed. Over half of the increase for training is being rolled over from the previous year. He noted that the training budget could well expand in the future. Mr. Conroy added, “Everything that we can do to protect the health of the firefighters, as well as the property of the taxpayers, is of paramount importance”.

Bob Franklin (Chief, EVFC #2) was on hand to explain the request made by Station #2. He gave a brief overview of their budget stating that they try to keep the annual budgets as even as possible, avoiding large requests in any particular budget year. He noted that any projects are generally projected over time to lessen the burden to taxpayers. He also noted that the increase in the building maintenance line item was due to the FEMA grant that will pay 95% of the cost of installing a fire alarm system in both stations in his area of responsibility, as well as a vehicle exhaust removal system in station

#2. His fuel costs have risen due to the higher cost of fuel for the trucks and heating oil along with the loss of an annual donation of heating oil from a local distributor.

Dennis Colacone (treasurer, EEDC) was on hand to explain their budget. With little exception, the EEDC budget increase is to bring their dispatchers one step closer to parity with their peers. Said Mr. Colacone, "We are trying to do this in two parts, one this year and again next year, with a similar request of about 12.6%". It was noted that the request in the second year would be less than the first due to a larger base salary figure in the second year. He read the letter written by the board of the Dispatch Corp. telling of the salary comparisons used to assemble this plan. Mr. Colacone also described the process whereby a new dispatcher is hired and evaluated, noting that the last dispatcher was replaced at a cost of just over \$22,000. Ms. Vergano inquired as to the number of calls per day handled by the dispatchers. Ms. Caito offered that the rescue run count for the year ending December 31, 2007 stood at 1,204.

Tom Caito (Chief, Exeter Rescue Corps) represented the Exeter Rescue Corps. He noted that this was the last year for his truck payment line item. And that with an increase in the vehicle maintenance line item, he was confident that he could get by another year with his current fleet of vehicles. He stated, however, there would be a request for a new vehicle in the next budget cycle. Mr. Nievera asked the approximate cost of the new vehicle. Mr. Caito estimated the cost at approximately \$140,000.

Public Comment and Questions

Dan Patterson questioned as to whether or not there was a budget cap enacted at the last annual meeting. Mr. Lacouture explained that there was a cap enacted on individual budget requests and that the only mechanism to exceed that cap would be for a majority of 2/3 of the members in attendance to vote to override that cap.

Heather Eklof stated that the public safety departments do a “terrific job” but during such tough economic times this may not be the year to increase the budget by more than 5.5%. (The total increase for the public safety budget is 7.1 %.) She asked if funding the reserve fund was necessary. Mr. Conroy explained the rationale for instituting the fund in the first place. Mr. Lacouture explained that the reserve fund would not be funded at this rate forever. When a percentage of the entire budget is reached, it will remain at that level. Ms. Eklof asked for, and received specifics as to the salary rates and health care coverage for the dispatchers. She did agree that they were underpaid when compared to their peers.

Ms. Vergano questioned the salary increase for the district collector. Mr. Lacouture responded that the non-bargained for employees were given a 5% raise in the last budget cycle and we had only budgeted for 3%. The feeling this year was to budget for 5% and use it if appropriate. There is nothing that states that we are obligated to increase the collector’s salary by 5%. Ms. Vergano is also concerned that there is “no tangible proof” that the district is saving the taxpayers any money. Chief Franklin disagreed, saying that the

fire companies work and purchase many items together in order to reap the benefits of combined purchasing. Mr. Franklin contends that it's not visible because it's built into the budget. Ms. Vergano suggested that perhaps several slides could be presented at the annual meeting to inform the taxpayers that this, in fact, is happening. She also touched on the issue of merging the insurance policies into one policy held by the district. Mr. (Jeff) Henderson and Chief Franklin both echoed earlier statements that RI State law does not allow for insuring a vehicle that is not owned by the policy holder. Brad Preston (VFIS) has stated to the board, during earlier meetings, that there are other fire districts in the state that cover their departments as Ms. Vergano is suggesting. However, this has not been researched by this board. Chief Franklin has no desire be the first policyholder to challenge this law in the courts. Mr. Lacouture asked for someone who might be willing to research this issue. There were no volunteers. Ms. Vergano reiterated her frustration that the two main promises made to the taxpayers during the campaign to create the fire district, (1) cost savings due to consolidation and (2) reduced homeowner's insurance from an improved ISO rating, have still not been realized.

Robert Johnson (Exeter Town Council and Public Safety Liaison) suggested that the benefits of volunteer fire departments are not evident to taxpayers, and won't be until there is established a fully paid department. He feels that the average taxpayer is not aware of the savings that we enjoy. Nor are they aware of the training that is necessary. Chief Franklin offered that he had between 10 and 12

firefighters that have recently completed or are near completion of a 120 hour, firefighter 1001 course. Chief Curry (EVFD #1) offered that in the not too distant future, no one without the 1001 designation would be allowed within the “hot zone” of an incident.

Mr. Lacouture offered that it was incumbent upon all of us to prolong the life of the volunteer departments as long as possible.

There being no further comments or questions, Mr. Nievera moved (Mr. Wilbur second) closing the public hearing at 9:02pm. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Nievera, Clerk
Exeter Fire District

Exeter Fire District
(February 28, 2008)
Call to Order

Following the conclusion of the budget hearing, the Board of Commissioners held their February meeting. Chairman Peter Lacouture called the February meeting of the Exeter Fire District to order at 9:03pm. Present were commissioners Vergano, Lacouture, Wilbur, Nievera, Walker and Gallagher. District treasurer, Ms. Caito

was in attendance. There were no members of the public in attendance.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Previous Month's Minutes

Several changes were made to the minutes of the February 7th meeting. After a brief discussion Mr. Wilbur moved (Mr. Gallagher second) acceptance of the minutes of the February 7th meeting, as corrected. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Nievera will re-circulate the corrected minutes at his earliest opportunity.

Communications

Mr. Nievera reported receiving a letter from Mike Cerullo expressing his interest for the posted position of moderator for the district's annual meeting. Mr. Lacouture reported receiving a packet of information from VFIS concerning our insurance coverage. All other operational mail has been given to the treasurer for her action.

Old Business

Mr. Lacouture presented the board with a draft copy of the state of affairs and the resolutions to be voted on at the annual meeting in April. Commissioners were asked to look them over and offer any corrections at the next meeting (March 6th).

Mr. Nievera reported on the status of the delinquent accounts for

the district. Mr. Lacouture requested that Mr. Nievera have a similar report ready for the annual meeting. Mr. Nievera will have a report ready with figures as current as possible.

New Business

There was no new business discussed.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners will be held on March 06, 2008 at the Exeter Public Library. The meeting will start at 7:30pm.

Adjournment

Mr. Wilbur moved (Mr. Walker second) adjournment at 9:17pm. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Nievera, Clerk

Exeter Fire District